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A SINGLE SERVICE: HELP OR HINDERANCE?

By

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U. S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

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USAWC RESEARCH ELEMENT
(Essay)

A Single Service: Help or Hinderance?

by

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SUMMARY

The history of the United States armed forces is replete with instances of organizational change. However, it was not until the advent of the airplane that major changes took place. World War II intensified the need for major organizational reforms. The result of this requirement was the passage of the National Security Act of 1947. This act has been amended three times in an attempt to perfect unification. In furtherance of this trend toward unification, certain service functions and activities have been integrated at the defense department level. These moves have led many to believe that the ultimate goal is a single service, while still others advocate unification only to the point of a Chief of Staff and a General Staff of the Armed Forces. In addition, many other concepts or variations have been proposed for the reorganization of the defense department. In any case, some organizational change appears to be in order.

A Single Service: Help or Hinderance?

Before writing on this subject, it seems appropriate to explain what is meant by the term "single service." As used here it implies the complete merger of the Army, Navy, and Air Force into a single service with a single superior staff and a single Chief of Staff as the senior military officer.

Unification on the other hand means various things to various persons or groups. A dictionary definition is really of no value when studying what is generally termed unification of the armed forces. The meanings extend from the loosest encouragement to cooperate to a tightly-knit, vertical structure of formal command over and including all three services. Thus, today we find an organization in the Department of Defense which lies somewhere in the middle of this range of meanings of unification.

For more than forty years the advocates for and those opposed to complete unification of the armed forces of the United States have argued its merits and demerits. However, in recent years these arguments have become longer, more heated, and more emotional. Originally, this problem interested only a few military officers, a limited number of civilians intimately associated with the military, and a small number of interested legislators. The persistence of the problem, coupled with steps taken in recent years by the Department of Defense in the area of integration of service functions and activities at defense level, have led many to believe that the ultimate goal is a single service. Still others have advocated a

reorganization of the Department of Defense along functional lines or a continuation of those steps already undertaken, leaving the various services as individual entities.

*The vast technological revolution of the twentieth century has extended to every human activity, but its impact has been felt in no area more forcibly than in that of the military art. Thus, we find in the development of complex weapon systems their becoming obsolete in some cases before they are deployed. A rapid advancement in technology or the introduction of new systems or techniques normally requires changes in organization; however, the military establishment itself has only in recent years begun to move forward organizationally to keep pace.

Much of this hesitancy on the part of the military establishment to keep pace can be attributed to the traditional arguments of the individual services over roles and missions, antipathy to organizational reform, and to the inherent jealousy and partisanship of the services. Additionally, there are those who argue that the size and complexity of the United States defense establishment militate against complete integration of the armed forces into a single service. On the other hand, the Canadian experiment in the adoption of a single unified defense force deserves an appraisal as to its success.

In consideration of the above, it seems logical to begin a discussion of a single service with a quick historical review of events leading to unification of the armed forces as we know it

today. Throughout our history, from the American Revolution until World War I, Army-Navy relations in joint operations varied from little or no voluntary cooperation to that of mutual cooperation, which yielded great success. However, the greatest successes occurred when either the land or sea commander was such a strong personality that his opposite number deferred to him.

The American Revolution was replete with examples of the above, wherein joint operations succeeded or failed solely because of the strong personality of the commander or the lack thereof. The French Admiral De Grasse, after having established control of the Chesapeake Bay, was prevented from defaulting on his part of the joint plan only because of an impassioned appeal by Washington, an appeal which he could just as well have ignored. It is true that the relatively primitive transportation and communications facilities of this period dictated the importance of individual personalities; but until the widespread creation of joint commands in World War II, the success of joint operations was too readily subject to the incompatibility between cooperating commanders.

These same examples of voluntary cooperation (or lack thereof) between Army and Navy commanders are found when studying The War of 1812. Here we find that Perry's thinking and action on Lake Erie were sound, his contribution toward the success of the Army was great, and his relations with it were good. On the other hand, on Lake Ontario Chauncey's thinking and action were unsound, his

contribution and support of the Army in the Niagara campaign were nil, and his relations with the Army were poor.

Both the Mexican and Civil Wars contributed their share of examples of successful as well as unsuccessful joint operations. As in the examples previously discussed, it was usually a lack of cooperation and understanding between the Army and Navy commanders which caused the unsuccessful joint operations; however, there were also instances of interservice rivalries and bickering at the Departmental level. This was due in large part to the fact that each Secretary aired his views directly to the President, and he alone could make the final decisions. The outbreak of the Spanish-American War found the Army ill-prepared and equipped to meet the demands placed upon it; nevertheless, its consequences on the armed forces were salutary. Reaction to the problems encountered during this conflict led to the creation of the General Staff of the Army, the General Board of the Navy, and the Joint Board of the Army and Navy. Although the Joint Board accomplished little from its formation in 1903 until 1919 when it was reorganized, it was a step in the right direction. This appears obvious in light of the lack of cooperation which had existed between the Army and the Navy up until that time.

As a result of the reorganization of both the Army and Navy headquarters following the Spanish-American War, there were no major instances of friction between the Army and the Navy during World War I. However, the nature of this war did not dictate

the need for much joint planning and joint direction of operations. The land war was on one front and in one theater, and the Navy contributed to that land war by assuring the security of lines of communications, which extended from the trenches to a base across three thousand miles of ocean. Virtually independent operations by the two Departments resulted in attaining a common and mutually satisfactory goal. It is safe to say that the United States never entered a war prior to 1941 with anything that could properly be called a joint war plan.

The rapid advances in technology since 1900 had produced more accurate and powerful weapons and weapons carriers such as the tank, the submarine, and the airplane. Likewise, communications had improved to the point that the military departments could exercise some control, rather than rely almost entirely upon their field commanders. In addition, the Army and the Navy began to cost an appalling amount of money. What previously could have been considered friendly, interservice competition now required careful scrutiny in order to preserve our national resources. In short, the age of global wars had arrived, and it became obvious that they could not be won without prior planning and coordination, not only among the services but also all other aspects of national potential. It was the airplane that changed the old coastline limit of authority between the Army and the Navy; it flew over both land and sea. Those who advocated a separate air service also created the fear of even less cooperation, since there would

be three separate services instead of two. On the other hand, the idea of three autonomous services probably sowed the seeds which led to the eventual unification of the Armed Forces and the establishment of a single defense Department.

Following World War I, both the Army and the Navy underwent reorganization, and the activities of the Joint Board increased. There was established a Joint Planning Committee within the Joint Board to do the "pick and shovel" work. These changes, coupled with the arguments pro and con for a separate Air Service, did improve the joint planning which took place and certainly emphasized the need for more coordination and cooperation between the Army and the Navy.

It was not until just prior to World War II that any major changes in this planning group occurred. In 1941 a Joint Strategic Committee was established under the Joint Board, and later that year a Joint Intelligence Committee was created. Thus, the existence of the Joint Board, with its subordinate agencies, provided a skeletal organization to face the enormous U.S. interservice and Anglo-American problems which lay ahead in World War II.

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, when Prime Minister Churchill visited the United States, it became apparent that some sort of combined planning agency would be required in order to provide for Anglo-American implementation of decisions. As a result, the American Chiefs of Staff Committee came into being as well as the Combined Chiefs of Staff (American and British). The United States

Joint Chiefs of Staff came into being shortly thereafter and held its first meeting in February 1942. The Joint Board, from this time forward, lapsed into a sort of shadow existence. However, the JCS never received any authorization until the passage of the National Security Act of 1947, and the Joint Board continued to exist on paper until its dissolution in September 1947. It became apparent early in the war that the need for joint and combined planning and operations was here to stay. Further, it appeared that the ideal of a single military service, except in early training and high command, was probably impracticable, but that the principle of three services within one military organization was sound.

Between 1944 and 1947 there were many studies made concerning the problem of unification, many Senate and Congressional hearings, and the usual arguments among the services as to roles and missions. The National Security Act of 1947 became law on July 26th of that year, and unification of the armed forces under a single Defense Department became a reality, and with it came a separate Air Force. Since its passage the National Security Act has been amended three times, and numerous other laws have been enacted which prescribe methods for the conduct of various affairs, which previously were considered under the purview of the Secretaries of War and of Navy. In addition, special commissions and committees by the dozen have probed into every facet of the defense organization.

Nearly every major operation and activity has been studied by agencies external to the Department of Defense.

There have been advanced numerous plans and schemes to reshape the Department of Defense by professional military persons, politicians, academicians, social theorists, syndicated columnists, and editorialists. Most of these proposals have followed one of several central themes. Among them are the concept of elimination of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the conversion of the Joint Staff into a general staff under a single chief of staff. This organization would serve as a supreme headquarters of the armed forces. A variant of this plan proposes divorce of the Joint Chiefs, as individuals, from all service affiliation. Another general scheme would be the abolition of the service departments and the transference of their overhead functions to the Department of Defense. This scheme would provide functional assistant secretaries for procurement, administration, weapons systems, research and development, etc., or assistant secretaries for Army, Navy, and Air Force. The residue in each department would be responsible primarily for uniservice training. Some proposals of this type retain the JCS: others adopt the single military chief of staff and a general staff. Under most of these schemes all operational forces would be assigned to unified commands, functional commands, or a combination of functional and area commands. Still other plans call for a complete merger of the Army, Navy, Air

Force, and Marine Corps into a single service, with a single chief of staff and military staff.

The last of these schemes is by far the most comprehensive. Were* such a plan adopted, it could obviously eliminate competition and controversy and at the same time provide unity of direction, control, doctrine, and advice. It would possess structural simplicity and would allow for flexibility in organizing, equipping, and deploying composite forces. Also, it would promise substantial savings by reducing overhead functions and by combining headquarters, depots, reserve centers, recruiting offices, communications facilities, and many other functional areas. It would permit the adoption of common personnel procedures, facilitate the efficient utilization of technicians and specialists, and allow for the consolidation of schooling in many areas.

The virtues of such a scheme are not, however, universally accepted. Opponents condemn this concept as providing for an unhealthy concentration of power and authority. It is their contention that dictatorial direction would be the result, rather than intelligent debate and discussion. Some believe that any chief of staff of a single service would be too much inclined to favor his former service, while others maintain that he would, in attempting to be impartial, chose a composite of service viewpoints which would, in the end, be less rational than those achieved by interservice compromise. It is claimed by some opponents that under such a system the general staff would become

involved in a morass of minutiae, while proponents point out that duplication of effort would be eliminated. Finally, there is the cry of destroying tradition, morale, and esprit de corps.

*For those who insist that a single service is impractical and would be carrying things too far, there appears to be sound arguments for the further integration of certain service functions and activities at the defense level. The armed forces have a uniform code of military justice. Do we need three separate chief military lawyers, each with a considerable staff? Would not a single judge advocate general be more economical, and would not the administration of military justice be simplified? In the area of financial management, is there a requirement for three separate audit agencies, each with regional offices, often one from each agency in the same locality? To carry this scheme a step further, do we really need three surgeons general? A Corps of Engineers, a Civil Engineering Corps, and a Directorate of Civil Engineering? This list could be carried on rather extensively; but before examining this scheme further, it appears appropriate at this point to consider the reasons behind the Canadian decision to integrate its defense forces into a single force.

The Minister of National Defense of Canada in March of 1964 stated in a white paper on Canadian defense policy that:

As in other Western countries, the defense forces of Canada have followed the historical division into three separate services, reflecting the traditional distinction drawn between the sea battle, the land

battle, and, in more modern times, the strategy of air power.

Doubts, however, have been raised in all countries in recent years about the traditional pattern of organization by individual services. Combined operations have become commonplace, and the services have found a growing area of overlap in the tasks with which they are charged....

...Such unity as the Canadian forces have been able to achieve has depended first and foremost on the unity of political direction which resulted from all three services being placed under the Minister of National Defense. Below the political level, however, efforts have been concentrated on achieving coordination rather than integration of the three services. The instrument through which coordination has been sought has been the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

The Royal Committee on Government Organization recommended a single command structure to eliminate coordination by the committee system, with its attendant delays and frustrations. The Royal Committee went on to point out that "the fundamental considerations are operational control and effectiveness, the streamlining of procedures and, in particular, the decision-making process, and the reduction of overhead."

Canada has taken this giant step and from all indications it is working well, although it is not complete and will not be for some time to come. The Canadian Defense Minister and the Chief of the Defense Staff both recognized the difficulties involved in such a move and were quick to point them out. Such things as morale, esprit de corps, and competition were considered. However, it is their view that these traditions will not be diminished but rather

in the long run will be strengthened. Their argument apparently is based upon the inefficiency which they say existed in the old system of separate services. That is, a new organization, if it is efficient, will not lose its esprit. The Chief of the Defense Staff has stated that it will require training a whole new military generation before all of the benefits are realized. The fact that complete integration of all of Canada's armed forces into a single service will work in Canada is not proof that such a plan will work in the United States. There are significant similarities, and as Canada's plan progresses, there will be more and more comparisons made in an attempt to show how this can work in the United States. It is true that the military forces of the two countries are alike in many ways. As indicated previously, there are many areas of duplication in the Armed Forces of the United States, some of which could, it appears, be integrated; but there are also many areas where complete unification into a single service appear to be infeasible. It is true that as the military budgets continue to rise, there will be increasing pressure to reduce costs wherever possible; however, in the United States this is being done by means other than unification, for the most part.

On further examination of Canada's armed forces, we find that they are much smaller, with a total regular strength of some 120,000. Additionally, few of her units have long histories as

completely separate units. The three services in Canada became relatively equal to one another only after World War II, and even then they were not headed by separate Ministers of departments as has been the case with the military departments in the United States since their authorization. Further, the bulk of Canada's armed forces is committed to operate primarily in international collective arrangements such as NATO, NORAD, and the peacekeeping actions of the UN. In fact, the Canadian Royal Commission commented that it did not contemplate independent action by Canada.

Thus it can be seen that the very composition and commitment of Canada's forces make them so completely different from those of the United States that similarities in these respects are almost meaningless. In other words, what will work for Canada will not necessarily work for the United States, and the reverse is also true. However, it appears that the Canadian experiment should be closely scrutinized for ideas that may have application to the armed forces of the United States, particularly in the area of economy of monies and natural resources.

Another of the schemes which was mentioned earlier in this discourse deserves, it seems, additional discussion. It is the concept of a single defense chief of staff and a general staff of the armed forces. It is true that this idea has been debated for years, but it is also true that the nature of national military problems in the modern world are constantly changing.

Perhaps these changing problems demand a change in organization at the top. The statutory limit on the number of officers allowed to be assigned to the Joint Staff has proved to be too small since its formation in 1947. It has been increased three times and has been bypassed by the Organization of the JCS, whereby certain agencies exist outside of the Joint Staff. Further, the Office of the Secretary of Defense has likewise grown steadily to its now more than 1500 civilians. This group comprises the Secretary's "general staff." But note that this group is primarily civilian, and it must be because of the law. Herein lies the heart of the problem. The primary concern of the Department of Defense is with military matters; therefore, the top staff should be military.

The service staff responsibilities have diminished as more and more of their functions have been withdrawn by the formation of functional agencies at defense level, such as the Defense Supply Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Communications Agency. Thus it would seem appropriate that the formation of a general staff of the armed forces could be organized, using the Joint Staff as a base, while absorbing a portion of the OSD "general staff" and portions of the service staffs.

What then would be the function of the individual service staffs? It would seem that eventually, in the event such an organization were to be brought to fruition, the service staffs would only be responsible for the supervision of training of land,

sea, and air forces. At the same time the military department staffs overseas could be combined to form unified command headquarters.

There are a fantastic number of problems to be solved and decisions to be made in any reorganization of the Department of Defense. However, it seems apparent that eventually a reorganization of some sort will take place. Whether it be toward a single service, a single chief of staff and general staff, or some other scheme, it will of necessity be a slow, step-by-step process to insure smooth functioning and continuity during the period of change. This has been the case with the integration of activities of the services to form the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Defense Supply Agency, and others which have occurred in recent years.

In conclusion, it appears that some sort of reorganization at the DOD level is required; however, it is believed that the single service concept for the armed forces of the United States would be more of a hinderance than a help. On the other hand, based upon the actions already taken in the area of integration of service functions and activities at defense level, there seem to be valid and logical arguments for the adoption of the concept of a single chief of staff and a general staff of the armed forces. Although the top military personnel must be versed in political, diplomatic, and economic fields, the very nature of present day military problems and their interrelationships with non-military aspects of national and international problems require that the top staff be military.

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